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HOW SHALL WE MAN OUR SHIPS ?

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THE question of manning the navy forced itself upon the attention of the British government some thirty years ago. A brief reference to the creditable manner in which it was disposed of then and there may aid us in answering the same question to-day in reference to our own navy.

The subject took a practical form when, in 1859, Her Majesty the Queen, in compliance with an "humble address" presented by Parliament, appointed as commissioners her "trusty and well-beloved cousin and councillor, Charles Philip, Earl of Hardwicke," together with certain members of Parliament, admirals, and ship-owners, "to inquire into the best means of manning the navy." In 1852 the First Lord of the Admiralty had appointed a board for the same purpose. But as the recommendations of the board were fully sustained by the royal commission, the two reports may be considered for the present as one and the same.

Prior to 1853 the practice in England, during peace, was to enter volunteers for particular ships, nominally for five years ; practically during the ship's commission, averaging from three to four years. Under this system it was found that, owing to a growing dislike on the part of the seamen for the royal navy, ships were sometimes from four to six months in getting their crews after being put in commission ; and during the Crimean War, when neither the temper—or say, rather, the enlightenment—of the English people nor the exigencies of the case rendered impressment advisable, it was the exception to find an English man-of-war with a full complement of seamen.

The commission declared that the system of volunteer enlistment was attended with great inconvenience to the public service, and even to the seamen themselves. Men who had been trained with great trouble and expense, and had been brought to a state

of the highest efficiency, were suddenly discharged at the expiration of a cruise, and, being unable to reënlist, often sought employment under a foreign flag ; and thus, when required for the navy, were not to be obtained. This led not only to great delay in conducting the ordinary duties of the service, but was the source of serious embarrassment when political considerations rendered necessary the speedy equipment of a fleet.

The first point considered by the commission in mitigation of the serious and growing evil was the extension of what was called the *continuous-service system*, by which seamen were induced, for certain advantages, to engage themselves to serve continuously for a period of ten years. That system had already been in operation from five to six years, had been attended with very beneficial results, and had secured to the country a body of well-trained and efficient seamen. But it was chiefly to the naval-apprentice boys, the enlistment of whom had been going on for a few preceding years, that the commission looked for the gradual organization of a permanent navy. "Men," it was said, "who had been received into the navy as boys became from early habits and associations more attached and adhered more closely to the service than those entered at a more advanced age ; and they eventually constituted, from their superior education and training, the most valuable part of the crews of Her Majesty's ships."

Attention was next called to the extreme importance of encouraging seamen to qualify as seamen-gunners. The commission recommended that the number under instruction on board the gunnery-ship "Excellent" and her tenders should be increased, as "they could not overrate the advantages which the naval service had derived from the systematic instruction and training in gunnery and the use of arms as established on board that ship." To induce seamen to enter the gunnery-ships "Excellent" and "Cambridge," and to qualify themselves for "the highly important situations of seamen-gunners," an increase of pay was recommended ; and, with the view of retaining them when once qualified, it was proposed that a period of five-years' service as seamen-gunner should count as six years towards a long-service pension ; and, further, that of the 4,000 men to be retained in the home ports, 1,000 should always be seamen-gunners. These measures were deemed sufficient to keep up the peace establishment.

Certain recommendations followed, which, if properly carried out, would tend to make the service more popular.

The commission then proceeds to consider the mode of manning the fleet in an emergency, and the recommendations merit our serious consideration. The report concludes as follows :

“ Your Majesty possesses in the merchant service elements of naval power such as no other government in the world enjoys. It is true that hitherto no sufficient organization has existed for securing the immediate command of these resources. During a long peace, reliance has been placed either on the improbability that danger would arise, or on the efficacy of impressment to furnish the means by which danger could be confronted and overcome. Changes in public sentiment and in the circumstances of the case have shaken that reliance. We rejoice to believe that by improvements in the administration of the navy, and in the regulation of the merchant service, other resources have in the mean time been placed within the reach of the government, and that it is now in their power to substitute for untrained, compulsory service, a system of defence, voluntary, effective, and calculated to draw closer to your Majesty, at the moment of danger, the loyal enthusiasm of those on whom your Majesty will rely. We therefore submit measures calculated to improve the position and elevate the character of the British seamen of both services.”

The recommendations of the commission were adopted and put in force, and the number of school-ships for the navy and for the merchant service was increased ; so that now the English navy is manned exclusively by continuous-service men who have, as boys, passed through the training-ships. We refer, of course, to the blue-jacket class only. Boys are entered to serve for ten years from the age of eighteen. The benefits are such that many seamen, on reaching the age of twenty-eight, elect to reënter for an additional term of ten years. At thirty-eight they receive an increase of pension, and the majority enter the coast guard, which constitutes part of the naval reserve. England has now in commission about eighteen training- and drill ships, 39,133 seamen, and 4,514 boys, 1,950 of the latter being under training. Her merchant tonnage amounts to 7,351,888, and her merchant seamen number 223,673 ; a very respectable body in point of numbers to draw on in an emergency.

The question of manning the navy was very summarily disposed of in France many years ago. Under the law, every citizen between the ages of eighteen and sixty must serve for a certain specified time either in the army or the navy. The French navy is manned by the system known as the *inscription maritime*. The

coasts of France are divided into five *arrondissements*, each one being presided over by a flag officer (admiral), commonly known as the *préfet maritime*. The subdivisions of the *arrondissements* are presided over by officers whose duty it is to keep carefully-revised lists of all the sailors in the district, as well as every man who follows the sea for a living, or even earns his daily bread by working in harbors, docks, upon canals, or in boats—every one, in short, who follows the craft of waterman. They are all obliged to serve in the navy. It was stated a few years ago that, as a result of this system, all the seamen of the French fleet taken from the maritime inscription had passed successively on board the ships of the national fleet ; and that all had received a complete education both in seamanship and gunnery. In the course of nine years the entire body of the merchant seamen must pass through the navy. The French seamen available for war number from 150,000 to 180,000. The French maritime organization is admirable, but too systematic for this country.

How we shall man our ships is a question that has never, to our knowledge, been seriously asked in this country. We still continue to depend on short-term enlistments of the nomads of the sea—the system so severely reprobated by the royal commission of 1859 and abandoned by the English government thirty years ago. It is a no-system. Nothing worse could possibly be devised to secure the end in view.

We have, it is true, borrowed from the English certain terms,—words having a vague meaning,—but we have contented ourselves with mere shadows without the substance. Thus we have a *continuous-service certificate*, but the holder thereof does not bind himself for a long term of service, and we have a *seaman-gunner* who is not a gunner. The English seaman-gunners, so highly prized in that service, are blue-jackets trained on board gunnery-ships in the *use* of heavy guns and arms of precision. They are seamen who become expert gunners ; hence the name. We educate them on shore, in machine-shops, as machinists, gunsmiths, and electricians, so that at the expiration of their short term of enlistment they can, and do, go into civil life, where they readily secure places giving them more pay per week than they can earn in the navy in a month. We cannot, at this moment, recall a more forcible illustration of over-education, or, rather, misdirected education.

Of our naval-apprentice system it is enough to say that it has been permitted to exist. The naval training system as now organized was established in 1875. After fifteen years of vicissitude we find that under our peculiar methods it has failed to render adequate returns, and our national ships have to-day much the same polyglot crews as formerly. The crew of the "Trenton," for example, represented, during her last cruise, *twenty-seven different nationalities*; 33 per cent. only were native-born Americans; and out of a total of 450 souls there were not more than fifteen who had passed through the training service.

The training service has not, however, been wholly barren of good results. It has disclosed the fact that there are plenty of boys in this country who gladly enter the navy, and who, under judicious management, are willing to stay in it; and there is overwhelming testimony to the superior quality of the young seamen who have reëntered the navy after serving out an honorable apprenticeship. These two facts encourage us to believe that, under the recently-improved method of naval administration, the course of naval training is about to take a fresh departure. Boys, now indentured till twenty-one only, will probably, under an amended law, be enlisted for longer terms; "continuous service" will henceforth mean continuous service as it was originally understood, and the "Lancaster," which will probably be commissioned the coming spring as a gunnery-ship, will give us real seamen-gunners. A justly-graduated scale of pay is, of course, a *sine quâ non*.

Having reached that most important point—a clearly-defined idea of what we really want—and having devised means of supplying that want, it will then be in order to double the capacity of the training service. Congress should allow the navy 1,500 boys.

So much for the revival of the original plan, inaugurated in this country in 1837, of manning our ships of war during peace with young American seamen trained up for the special purpose. The experiment of 1837 failed, as did that of 1864. But there is every reason for believing that the ultimate success of the present undertaking is now assured, and that henceforth our ships of war will be manned by Americans only.

The subject of manning national ships comprises two separate and distinct parts—the supplying of trained seamen for a peace

establishment, and the provision for a reserve, consisting of a large body of seafaring people, on which to levy in time of war. We have seen what has been done in this latter respect by the two great naval powers of the world.

Engaged in our foreign trade, coastwise traffic, and fisheries, it is estimated that there are about 285,000 seamen ; but there is no way by which the government can reach them in an emergency, save by voluntary enlistment and bounty. In England the general superintendence of all matters relating to merchant shipping and merchant seamen comes under the Board of Trade, a bureau of which, the Registrar-General of Seamen, has to do with all matters indicated by its title. The president of the Board of Trade is a cabinet officer. Such an executive department is essential to the complete rehabilitation of our mercantile marine and the enumeration of our seamen. Through the Board of Trade the British government keeps "in touch" with the merchant seamen. We need a Board of Trade, or its equivalent.

As a prosperous merchant service is the foundation of naval power, the revival of our shipping interests means the more thorough rehabilitation of the navy. Hence the great importance to the navy of Senate bill No. 1,628, reported by Senator Frye and passed by the Senate during the first session of the Fifty-first Congress. The preamble of that bill lays down the sound principle that a mercantile marine of our own, "built, manned, and used by our own people, is a national requirement, essential to a fair participation in the trade of the world, indispensable to a wise industrial economy of state, and vital to the independence and defence of the Union." Let Congress, during the present session, pass that bill, and add to the executive government a Department of Commerce, and the value of our maritime defences will be increased a hundred-fold and the second part of our question be fully answered.

S. B. LUCE.